

Message Text

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SUBJECT: THANOM RETURNS

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SUMMARY. FORMER PRIME MINISTER THANOM'S RETURN TO BANGKOK PUTS THE GOVERNMENT IN A BIND. GOVERNMENT COULD NOT BAR HIS RETURN AND CANNOT ARREST HIM WITHOUT SPECIFIC EVIDENCE OF CRIMINAL ACTS. CITY CALM, BUT ACTIVIST GROUPS, LED BY THE NSCT, PREPARING TO ORGANIZE PROTESTS IF GOVERNMENT DOES NOT FORCE THANOM TO LEAVE, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. HIGH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, INCLUDING SECRETARY-GENERAL OF PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE, NITHIPHAT CHALICHAN, ATTENDED THANOM'S ORDINATION CEREMONY SEPTEMBER 19. END SUMMARY.

1. AS REPORTED IN REFTEL FORMER PRIME MINISTER THANOM KITTIKHACHON RETURNED TO THAILAND ON SEPTEMBER 19 IN DEFIANCE OF RTG ADVICE AND WAS IMMEDIATELY ORDAINED A MONK AT WAT BOWONNIWET. (NOTE: THIS IS BGN SPELLING
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OF WAT. THAT USED IN REFTEL IS USUAL NEWSPAPER

TRANSLITERATION.) ATTENDING THE ORDINATION CEREMONY WERE NITHIPHAT CHALICHAN, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE; POLICE DEPUTY-DIRECTOR GENERAL LTG CHUMPHON LOHACHALA; COMMISSIONER OF THE METROPOLITAN POLICE LTG WICHIAN SAENGKAE0; ASSISTANT DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF TNP0 LTG NARONG MAHANON; AND LTG YOT THEPHASADIN NA AYTTHAYA, NEWLY APPOINTED ASSISTANT COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMY. AFTER THE CEREMONY THANOM VISITED HIS AILING FATHER.

2. THE RTG'S OFFICIAL POSITION ON THANOM'S RETURN IS YET UNFORMED. PRIME MINISTER M.R. SENI PRAMOT TOLD PRESS SEPTEMBER 19 (AFTER THANOM'S RETURN) THAT THE CABINET WOULD CONSIDER THANOM'S SITUATION AT ITS REGULAR MEETING ON SEPTEMBER 21. HE ALSO REITERATED THE RTG POSITION THAT THANOM HAS A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO RETURN TO THAILAND. IN REPLY TO A QUESTION SENI SAID THAT THANOM COULD NOT BE ARRESTED UNTIL AFTER AN INVESTIGATION HAD SHOWN THAT THERE WAS SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE TO SEND THE CASE TO COURT.

3. THE PRIME MINISTER TOLD PRESS THAT HE WAS NOT CERTAIN THAT THANOM WAS RETURNING ON SEPTEMBER 19 UNTIL AFTER THANOM WAS ON THE PLANE BOUND FOR BANGKOK. PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT HE HAD RECEIVED CONFLICTING REPORTS ON SEPTEMBER 18 AND THE MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 19 WHETHER THANOM WOULD OR WOULD NOT RETURN.

4. BANGKOK REMAINS CALM, ALTHOUGH ANTI-THANOM POSTERS ARE SPROUTING UP THROUGHOUT THE CIT. PREDICTABLY, THE ACTIVIST GROUPS, LED BY THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND (NSCT), HAVE DENOUNCED THANOM'S RETURN AND ASKED FOR HIS OUSTER OR HIS ARREST FOR HIS PART IN THE DEATHS DURING THE OCTOBER, 1973, UPRISING. THEY HAVE BITTERLY ATTACKED HIM FOR STAINING BUDDHISM BY USING IT AS AN EXCUSE FOR HIS RETURN. THE ACTIVISTS MET ON SEPTEMBER 19. AFTER THE MEETING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GROUPS, LED BY NSCT SECRETARY-GENERAL SUTHAM SAENGPRATHUM, WENT TO SEE THE PRIME MINISTER TO PRESENT THEIR DEMANDS. SUTHAM TOLD THE PRESS LATER THAT THE ACTIVISTS WOULD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WAIT TO SEE WHAT ACTION THE RTG TAKES ON THANOM'S RETURN. IF IT IS NOT ACCEPTABLE, THE ACTIVISTS WILL ORGANIZE PROTESTS.

5. THANOM'S RETURN AND ORDINATION WERE FEATURED ON THE FRONT PAGES OF ALL THAI, CHINESE AND ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS. THE ARTICLES HAVE REPORTED THE FACTS WITH LITTLE EDITORIALIZING, BUT FURTHER COMMENT SHOULD

FOLLOW IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS.

6. COMMENT: THE GOVERNMENT IS TAKING THANOM'S RETURN CALMLY AND WITH A TOUCH OF RESIGNATION. THEY HAVE BEEN THROUGH THIS EXERCISE BEFORE WITH PRAPHAT. SINCE IT COULD NOT CONSTITUTIONALLY BAR HIS RETURN AND CANNOT ARREST HIM WITHOUT MORE SUBSTANTIAL EVIDENCE, THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO HOPE THE ISSUE WILL DIE DOWN OR, IF NECESSARY, PERSUADE THANOM TO RETURN TO EXILE FOR THE GOOD OF THE COUNTRY.
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